Childhood

Childhood is the age span ranging from birth to adolescence.[1][2] According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, childhood consists of two stages: preoperational stage and concrete operational stage. In developmental psychology, childhood is divided up into the developmental stages of toddlerhood (learning to walk), early childhood (play age), middle childhood (school age), and adolescence (puberty through post-puberty). Various childhood factors could affect a person's attitude formation.[1]

Smiling children

The concept of childhood emerged during the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly through the educational theories of the philosopher John Locke and the growth of books for and about children.[3] Previous to this point, children were often seen as incomplete versions of adults.

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Time span, age ranges

The term *childhood* is non-specific in its time span and can imply a varying range of years in human development. It may refer to the period between infancy and adulthood,[4] or the time span from birth to puberty.[2]

In the legal systems of many countries, there is an age of majority when childhood legally ends and a person legally becomes an adult, which ranges anywhere from 15 to 21, with 18 being the most common.

A global consensus on the terms of childhood is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).[5]

Childhood expectancy indicates the time span, which a child has to experience childhood.[6]

Eight life events described as "childhood enders" by Save the Children are death, extreme malnourishment, extreme violence, conflict forcing displacement, children being out of school, child labor, children having children, and child marriage.[6]

Developmental stages of childhood

Early childhood

Early childhood follows the infancy stage and begins with toddlerhood when the child begins speaking or taking steps independently. While toddlerhood ends around age three when the child becomes less dependent on parental assistance for basic needs, early childhood continues approximately until the age of six. However, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, early childhood also includes infancy. At this stage children are learning through observing, experimenting and communicating with others. Adults supervise and support the development process of the child, which then will lead to the child's autonomy. Also during this stage, a strong emotional bond is created between the child and the care providers. The children also start to begin kindergarten at this age to start their social lives.

Children playing the violin in a group recital, Ithaca, New York, 2011

Middle childhood

Middle childhood begins at around age seven, approximating primary school age. It ends around puberty (around age 12 or 13), which typically marks the beginning of adolescence. In this period, children develop socially and mentally. They are at a stage where they make new friends and gain new skills, which will enable them to become more independent and enhance their individuality. During middle childhood, children enter the school years, where they are presented with a different setting than they are used to. This new setting creates new challenges and faces for children.[7] Upon the entrance of school, mental disorders that would normally not be noticed come to light. Many of these disorders include: autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and ADHD.[8] Fortunately there are many ways to help these children: special education, LRE, RTI, IEP plans are all specialized plans to help children with disabilities.[9] Middle childhood is the time when children begin to understand responsibility and are beginning to be shaped by their peers and parents. Chores and more responsible decisions come at this time, and so does social comparison.[10] Along with social comparison comes social play. With social play comes learning and teaching. During social play children learn from each other, and they also teach each other this is often done with observation.[11]

Children in Madagascar, 2011

Child playing piano, 1984

Adolescence

Adolescence is usually determined by the onset of puberty. However, puberty may also begin in preadolescence. Adolescence is biologically distinct from childhood, but it is accepted by some cultures as a part of social childhood, because most of them are minors. The onset of adolescence brings about various physical, psychological and behavioral changes. The end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood varies by country and by function, and even within a single nation-state or culture there may be different ages at which an individual is considered to be mature enough to be entrusted by society with certain tasks.

History

During the European Renaissance, artistic depictions of children increased dramatically, which did not affect the social attitude to children much, however.

Playing Children, by Song Dynasty Chinese artist Su Hanchen, c. 1150 AD.

During the 1600s, the concept of childhood began to emerge in Europe.[12] Adults saw children as separate beings, innocent and in need of protection and training by the adults around them. The English philosopher John Locke was particularly influential in defining this new attitude towards children, especially with regard to his theory of the tabula rasa, which considered the mind at birth to be a "blank slate". A corollary of this doctrine was that the mind of the child was born blank, and that it was the duty of the parents to imbue the child with correct notions. During the early period of capitalism, the rise of a large, commercial middle class, mainly in the Protestant countries of the Dutch Republic and England, brought about a new family ideology centred around the upbringing of children. Puritanism stressed the importance of individual salvation and concern for the spiritual welfare of children.[13]

The Age of Innocence c.1785/8. Reynolds emphasized the natural grace of children in his paintings

The modern notion of childhood with its own autonomy and goals began to emerge during the 18th century Enlightenment and the Romantic period that followed it. Jean Jacques Rousseau formulated the romantic attitude towards children in his famous 1762 novel *Emile: or, On Education*. Building on the ideas of John Locke and other 17th-century thinkers, Jean-Jaques Rousseau described childhood as a brief period of sanctuary before people encounter the perils and hardships of adulthood.[14] Sir Joshua Reynolds' extensive children portraiture demonstrated the new enlightened attitudes toward young children. His 1788 painting *The Age of Innocence*, emphasizes the innocence and natural grace of the posing child and soon became a public favourite.

The idea of childhood as a locus of divinity and innocence is further expounded upon in William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", the imagery of which he "fashioned from a complex mix of pastoral aesthetics, pantheistic views of divinity, and an idea of spiritual purity based on an Edenic notion of pastoral innocence infused with Neoplatonic notions of reincarnation".[15] This Romantic conception of childhood, historian Margaret Reeves suggests, has a longer history than generally recognized, with its roots traceable to similarly imaginative constructions of childhood circulating, for example, in the neo-platonic poetry of seventeenth-century metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan (e.g., "The Retreate", 1650; "Childe-hood", 1655). Such views contrasted with the stridently didactic, Calvinist views of infant depravity.[16]

With the onset of industrialisation in England in 1760, the divergence between high-minded romantic ideals of childhood and the reality of the growing magnitude of child exploitation in the workplace, became increasingly apparent. By the late 18th century, British children were specially employed in factories and mines and as chimney sweeps,[17] often working long hours in dangerous jobs for low pay.[18] As the century wore on, the contradiction between the conditions on the ground for children of the poor and the middle-class notion of childhood as a time of innocence led to the first campaigns for the imposition of legal protection for children.

British reformers attacked child labor from the 1830s onward, bolstered by the horrific descriptions of London street life by Charles Dickens.[19] The campaign eventually led to the Factory Acts, which mitigated the exploitation of children at the workplace.[20][21]

Modern concepts of childhood

Armenian scouts in 1918

The modern attitude to children emerged by the late 19th century; the Victorian middle and upper classes emphasized the role of the family and the sanctity of the child, – an attitude that has remained dominant in Western societies ever since.[22] The genre of children's literature took off, with a proliferation of humorous, child-oriented books attuned to the child's imagination. Lewis Carroll's fantasy *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, published in 1865 in England, was a landmark in the genre; regarded as the first "English masterpiece written for children", its publication opened the "First Golden Age" of children's literature.

The latter half of the 19th century saw the introduction of compulsory state schooling of children across Europe, which decisively removed children from the workplace into schools. The market economy of the 19th century enabled the concept of childhood as a time of fun of happiness. Factory-made dolls and doll houses delighted the girls and organized sports and activities were played by the boys.[23] The Boy Scouts was founded by Sir Robert Baden-Powell in 1908,[24] which provided young boys with outdoor activities aiming at developing character, citizenship, and personal fitness qualities.[25]

Children play in the fountain in a summer evening, Davis, California.

In the 20th century, Philippe Ariès, a French historian specializing in medieval history, suggested that childhood was not a natural phenomenon, but a creation of society in his 1960 book *Centuries of Childhood*. In 1961 he published a study of paintings, gravestones, furniture, and school records, finding that before the 17th-century, children were represented as mini-adults.

In 1966, the American philosopher George Boas published the book *The Cult of Childhood*. Since then, historians have increasingly researched childhood in past times.

Nepalese children playing with cats.

In 2006 Hugh Cunningham, published the book *Invention of Childhood* looking at British childhood from the year 1000, the Middle Ages to what he refers to as the Post War Period of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

The concept of childhood appears to evolve and change shape as lifestyles change and adult expectations alter. Some believe that children should not have any worries and should not have to work; life should be happy and trouble-free. Childhood is usually a mixture of happiness, wonder, angst and resilience. It is

generally a time of playing, learning, socializing, exploring, and worrying in a world without much adult interference, aside from parents. It is a time of learning about responsibilities without having to deal with adult responsibilities.

A "loss of innocence" is a common concept, and is often seen as an integral part of coming of age. It is usually thought of as an experience or period in a child's life that widens their awareness of evil, pain or the world around them. This theme is demonstrated in the novels *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Lord of the Flies*. The fictional character Peter Pan was the embodiment of a childhood that never ends.

Harari girls in Ethiopia.

Geographies of childhood

The geographies of childhood involves how (adult) society perceives the idea of childhood, the many ways adult attitudes and behaviors affect children's lives, including the environment which surrounds children and its implications.

The geographies of childhood is similar in some respects to children's geographies which examines the places and spaces in which children live.

Nature deficit disorder

Nature Deficit Disorder, a term coined by Richard Louv in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, refers to the trend in the United States and Canada towards less time for outdoor play,[26][27] resulting in a wide range of behavioral problems.[28]

With increasing use of cellphones, computers, video games and television, children have more reasons to stay inside rather than outdoors exploring. “The average American child spends 44 hours a week with electronic media”.[29] Research in 2007 has drawn a correlation between the declining number of National Park visits in the U.S. and increasing consumption of electronic media by children.[30] The media has accelerated the trend for children's nature disconnection by deemphasizing views of nature, as in Disney films.[31]

Healthy childhoods

Role of parents

Children's health

Children's health includes the physical, mental and social well-being of children. Maintaining children's health implies offering them healthy foods, insuring they get enough sleep and exercise, and protecting their safety.[32] Children in certain parts of the world often suffer from malnutrition, which is often associated with other conditions, such diarrhea, pneumonia and malaria.[33]

Child protection

Child protection, according to UNICEF, refers to "preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children – including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage".[34] The Convention on the Rights of the Child protects the fundamental rights of children.

Play

Play is essential to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children.[35] It offers children opportunities for physical (running, jumping, climbing, etc.), intellectual (social skills, community norms, ethics and general knowledge) and emotional development (empathy, compassion, and friendships). Unstructured play encourages creativity and imagination. Playing and interacting with other children, as well as some adults, provides opportunities for friendships, social interactions, conflicts and resolutions. However, adults tend to (often mistakenly) assume that virtually all children's social activities can be understood as "play" and, furthermore, that children's play activities do not involve much skill or effort.[36][37][38][39]

It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers.[35] Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. However, when play is controlled by adults, children acquiesce to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the benefits play offers them. This is especially true in developing creativity, leadership, and group skills.[35]

Play is considered to be so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights as a right of every child.[40] Children who are being raised in a hurried and pressured style may limit the protective benefits they would gain from child-driven play.[35]

Ralph Hedley, *The Tournament*, 1898

The initiation of play in a classroom setting allows teachers and students to interact through playfulness associated with a learning experience. Therefore, playfulness aids the interactions between adults and children in a learning environment. “Playful Structure” means to combine informal learning with formal learning to produce an effective learning experience for children at a young age.[41]

Even though play is considered to be the most important to optimal child development, the environment affects their play and therefore their development. Poor children confront widespread environmental inequities as they experience less social support, and their parents are less responsive and more authoritarian. Children from low income families are most likely to have less access to books and computers which affects their development as they do not have access to resources that would enhance their development.[42]

Street culture

Children's street culture refers to the cumulative culture created by young children and is sometimes referred to as their *secret world*. It is most common in children between the ages of seven and twelve. It is strongest in urban working class industrial districts where children are traditionally free to play out in the streets for long periods without supervision. It is invented and largely sustained by children themselves with little adult interference.

Children in front of a movie theatre, Toronto, 1920s.

Young children's street culture usually takes place on quiet backstreets and pavements, and along routes that venture out into local parks, playgrounds, scrub and wasteland, and to local shops. It often imposes imaginative status on certain sections of the urban realm (local buildings, kerbs, street objects, etc.). Children designate specific areas that serve as informal meeting and relaxation places (see: Sobel, 2001). An urban area that looks faceless or neglected to an adult may have deep 'spirit of place' meanings in to children. Since the advent of indoor distractions such as video games, and television, concerns have been expressed about the vitality – or even the survival – of children's street culture.

Children's rights

Children's rights are the human rights of children, with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to minors, and provision of basic necessities. Children's rights are not respected in all countries. Globally, millions of children are subjected to exploitation, including deprivation of education, child labour, forced military service, or imprisonment in institutions or detention centers where they endure poor conditions and violence.[43]

Research in social sciences

In recent years there has been a rapid growth of interest in the sociological study of adulthood. Reaching on a large body of contemporary sociological and anthropological research, people have developed key links between the study of childhood and multiple disciplines including social theory, exploring its historical, political, and cultural dimensions internationally.

See also

- Birthday party
- Child
- Childhood and migration
- Childhood in Medieval England
- Children's party games
- Coming of age
- Developmental biology
- List of child related articles
- List of traditional children's games
- Rite of passage
- Sociology of childhood
- Street children

Footnotes

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External links

- Childhood (https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0054653) on *In Our Time* at the BBC
- World Childhood Foundation (http://www.childhood.org/)
- Meeting Early Childhood Needs (http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/Documents/programme_educatif_en.pdf)

Preceded by **Toddlerhood**	**Stages of human development** Early childhood, Childhood	Succeeded by **Preadolescence**

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